

PRESS CONFERENCE:

Major General Kevin J. Bergner, Spokesman, Multi-National Force – Iraq

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REPORTERS:

Dean Yates from Reuters

Jim Glanz from The New York Times

Ned Colt with NBC

Ernesto Londoño with The Washington Post

Jarrold[?] from AFP

Unidentified reporters from CNN, Al-Hayat Newspaper, Al-Huriya TV.

REPORTERS 1-15

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Good afternoon everyone. The Multi-National Force joins the Iraqi people in expressing our strong condemnation of the bombings that killed and wounded dozens of innocent Iraqi citizens yesterday. These residents of Baqubah, Ramadi, Mosul, and Baghdad were killed senselessly. Some were near a courthouse. Some had stopped for lunch at a restaurant. And others were merely walking in their neighborhoods. The Multi-National Force is working with the Iraqi authorities to help find those responsible and bring them to justice. We are also working closely with the Government of Iraq to make sure that the victims receive the necessary medical aid and humanitarian assistance. While we are still investigating the circumstances of each case, these attacks have the hallmarks of being perpetrated by al-Qaeda – Iraq. Such attacks disgust civilized people and refresh our awareness of the depths to which terrorists will sink to terrorize innocent people. These attacks further reinforce the importance of continuing to pursue al-Qaeda terrorist networks, to disrupt their operations, and to interdict their leadership. In that regard, we have recently intercepted an al-Qaeda document which provides insight into the mind of one terrorist and provides further evidence about the strategy and tactics of violence that al-Qaeda is pursuing. During an operation northwest of Baghdad in early March, coalition

forces captured three terrorists and killed three others at a remote farmhouse. In the ensuing search of their hideout, security forces seized a suicide vest, three computers, a thumb drive, computer disks, and a stack of documents. One of the terrorists killed during the operation was found to be carrying a document intended for Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the foreign-born leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. The document was authored by an al-Qaeda terrorist named Abu Safyan, who is assessed to have been from Diyala. It lays out suggested tactics for al-Qaeda terror operations in Iraq. Abu Safyan's writings propose a framework to divide the Iraq people and to incite violence. This document is just one man's articulation, one terrorist's views about instigating conflict and turning Iraqis against each other. But it is also quite consistent with the patterns of violence we see from al-Qaeda in Iraq. The document focuses on the need to battle the Awakening groups, these groups that have rejected foreign extremism and terrorism in Iraq. The author calls for igniting a cycle of violence to weaken the Awakening movement and reflects concern that the Awakening movement constitutes a very real threat to the terrorists – a threat that has to be undermined, in his writings. Another part of the document outlines a strategy to create distrust and division and to provoke sectarian violence. The document says that al-Qaeda must attempt to instigate hostility between the coalition forces, local governments, the population, and the Awakening groups. Abu Safyan writes, "We must always leave the economy in psychological conflict.

They can never have stability so that they keep busy with themselves and not be able to unite against us.” The document continues by providing terrorists with instructions on how to attack the economy of Iraq and weaken the legitimate government. It lays out—it says that al-Qaeda members should attack Iraq’s gas and oil fields and pipelines as well as the country’s electrical stations and power lines. This part of the document calls for a heightened war against Iraq’s infrastructure and the economic well being of the nation; the kind of attacks that deprive the Iraqi people of economic opportunity and essential services, really the basic services that they deserve and depend on. These writings by one individual, Abu Safyan, are further examples of the corrupt ideology that Iraqis are broadly rejecting. In fact, we have seen about 100,000 Iraqi men choose a different path and join local volunteer groups like the Sons of Iraq instead of subscribing to this kind of an ideology. The efforts of these local volunteers and the Iraqi people are also enabling more effective operations against al-Qaeda networks and their leaders. In recent weeks, Iraqi forces and their coalition partners continued to disrupt and pressure the extremist groups. But there is still tough work to do as yesterday’s tragic attacks show so starkly. Nevertheless, since our last summary, there are 53 leaders in the al-Qaeda – Iraq terrorist network that have been captured or killed. The ten most significant of these terror leaders are listed on this slide and include five emirs, three cell leaders, and two facilitators. Abd-al-Rahman Ibrahim Jasim Tha’ir was the military emir

responsible for al-Qaeda operations in Mosul. He is the former military emir of Bayji who was moved to Mosul because of the city's importance to al-Qaeda. We previously announced his capture on March 2nd when we told you he provided valuable intelligence that led to the killing of two Saudi al-Qaeda terrorists outside of Mosul. At that point we were still exploiting the intelligence from his capture so we wanted to—so we were unable to disclose his specific identity at that point. Muhammad Fathi Hammad Husayn was an al-Qaeda cell leader in Sharqat. He was also moved from Bayji where he was formerly the emir in charge of the assassinations. Jasim Najm Khalaf Muhammad, who was captured in Tarmiyah; he was a leader in al-Qaeda's network in Karkh who was trying to reconstitute terrorist networks here in Baghdad. Ali Mustashar 'Ali was a facilitator for VBIEDs or vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices in Baghdad. He and his associates had moved explosives, vehicles, and suicide bombers in Iraq's capitol. We captured Hamid 'Awayd Muhammad in Baghdad where he was also a facilitator for attacks using car and truck bombs. Once the al-Qaeda emir responsible for Anbar Province; at the time of his capture, he handled the logistics for vehicle-bomb attacks north of Baghdad. Ahmad Husayn Ghanim 'Ali was the security emir for East Mosul. And Abu Mansur was killed in Mosul, on March 8th, where he was al-Qaeda's deputy emir for the city and acted as a judge in the terror network's illegal courts. His job was to try to cloak the corrupt ideology with religious sanction. Tu'mah Khalaf Mutar Hassan was

the leader of al-Qaeda's cell in Samarra, working closely with the emir for that area. We captured him there in early March. Muqdad Ibrahim 'Abbas Husayn was al-Qaeda's military emir for Jalam, which is just east of Baghdad. He coordinated terror operations with his counterparts from Tikrit, Samarra, and Mosul and arranged al-Qaeda leadership meetings in the Tigris River Valley. He also oversaw kidnappings for ransom that the terrorists relied on to fund their operations. Mahmud 'Abd-al-Hamid 'Isa 'Alawi was al-Qaeda's military emir for South Karkh. His operations focused on trying to use car and truck bombs in East and West Rashid, Karrada, and Mansour. These terrorists are just one component of the mosaic of security threats that seek to destabilize Iraq and incite a cycle of violence the Iraqi people broadly reject. Days like yesterday and other recent violence tests the courage of the Iraqi people and their security forces, but also highlight the need to keep going forward and the need to keep pursuing these terrorists. That concludes our update for today. And I'll be glad to take your questions now. Yes, sir.

REP1:

General Bergner, Dean Yates from Reuters. The Iraqi authorities have just fired the two top Iraqi generals in Basra: General Mohan and General Khalaf. It's my understanding that these were two of the most highly regarded Iraqi generals in the country. I'm just wondering if you have any comment on their dismissal.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, they have been two key leaders of the Baghdad Operations Command—excuse me, the Basra Operations Command for some time. And I have seen reports that they are being removed from those positions and that others are being installed in those positions. And I believe one of those may, indeed, be the division commander of the 14th Iraqi Army Division who is largely now the one conducting operations in Basra. And so the change in leadership is one that I would really defer to the Government of Iraq to further characterize because I have both seen those reports and I have also seen that those two leaders are still conducting their leadership responsibilities there. So we'll follow up with you.

REP1:

This wouldn't be a good time to be changing leadership in Basra given everything that's been going on there.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, I would really leave that decision in the hands of the Government of Iraq to assess their leaders and to determine when the best circumstance is to change those leaders. This is their decision. Jim.

REP2: Hello, General Bergner. Jim Glanz, New York Times. This is sort of a two-part question. Is Abu Safyan or any of the other, I think, approximately ten people you mentioned an Iraqi or a foreigner? And in that context, you know we've been struggling for awhile with how to characterize the U.S. view of AQI and to what degree it is or is not foreign led. You know we have a phrase that we repeat and sometimes it changes from time to time but it's really based on what we hear from you...

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** Mm-hmm.

REP2: ...because we, you know, I think our phrase at the moment is, you know, "AQI which American intelligence says is, in part, foreign led," or something like that and we calibrate it at different times and so we call upon you to...

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** Absolutely.

REP2: ...let us know what you believe the extent of this leadership is. And it seems to have changed recently so that's why I ask, in the case of this Abu Safyan, he wrote a document – as you said, one man's

view but it sounds like a pretty strategic document and it went right to the person you think is leading a lot of this effort. So is he Iraqi or is he foreign – that is from outside Iraq? And then can you give us the update on what the U.S. feels—believes about the foreign leadership of AQI?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Yeah. Well first, let me start with the second part. There is no question but that al-Qaeda – Iraq still relies on foreign-led leadership: Abu Ayyub al-Masri, an Egyptian. We have talked about Tunisi, the Turkey brothers. We have talked about a full range of foreign leaders that have been sent to Iraq to help facilitate foreign fighters, to help provide direction to the network. But by the same token, we have also said all along that the rank and file are largely Iraqi people and that—so they are—there is both of those things. There is a foreign-led aspect to the al-Qaeda network but many of the rank and file obviously being Iraqis. The document that we talked about today—Abu Safyan is an individual we are still learning more about. He was not in the—he was not among those who we captured or killed at the farmhouse in early March. His document indicates that he was operating out of Diyala. And because all we have is Abu Safyan, it's difficult for us to further characterize exactly where he's from in terms of being Iraqi or

foreign born. But that does continue to be our assessment that this is a foreign-led terrorist network with rank and file largely being of Iraqis. Yes, ma'am.

REP3: [Unintelligible]. CNN. The question is—I think you can hear me without the mike.

MAJ GEN BERGNER: I can but everybody else can't. Thank you.

REP3: But the question being yesterday's attacks which seemed to be coordinated to a certain level, they seemed to have certain characteristics that they shared: provincial capitols, right around the same time. Do you put those in the same category? Do you think there was coordination in those attacks? And what, if any, connection do you make to an internal message that was allegedly posted by al-Baghdadi the previous day. And I know you disputed the existence of al-Baghdadi, but do you see any connection and coordination among the attacks and possibly having anything to do with a message posted the previous day?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Well, as you'd expect, we're still investigating the circumstances of

each attack and, as I mentioned, they have similar hallmarks of al-Qaeda attacks that we have seen before. Exactly how coordinated they were is something that we'll learn more about. But there's been no—there is no question that al-Qaeda in Iraq has continued to seek spectacular attacks that were specifically [to] incite sectarian violence and increasingly target those who are making it difficult for them to conduct their operations. Many of the people in the restaurant that were attacked were policeman. That was a place that was known to be frequented by Iraqi police. And so they are continuing to attempt to intimidate and undermine the capabilities of the Iraqi security forces and those who have chosen to reject al-Qaeda in their communities, those who are part of this Awakening effort. And so that's the characterization that we can best give you today about the attacks we saw yesterday. Yes, sir.

REP4:

Ned Colt with NBC. I'm just curious how up to date you are, up to speed you are on the amnesty law that was approved back in February. We've been speaking with members of [the] Iraqi judiciary who now say three out of four prisoners held by—in Iraqi jails are going to be released and the total number is now about 24,000 of which I think about 15,000 have been released. I think everyone would agree that the amnesty law started with a good concept of national reconciliation and so on, but is there a security

concern with this number of people being released onto the streets, many of whom haven't even been charged, don't have enough evidence to hold them, and who maybe altogether unsavory individuals?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, I think first of all you have to understand the intent in which the amnesty law was nested by the Government of Iraq. It was an intent to provide a basis for reconciliation and an attempt for Iraq to move forward. And so as you pointed out, Ned, it does provide a basis to categorize offenses and to provide a judicial review process under which those cases are reviewed and assessed to either comply with the intent of the amnesty law or fall outside of that in which case either the post-trial result or continued pursuit of judicial hearings would take place. Like many things, much of that will—much of the affect that's achieved will be dependent upon how it's implemented. And that's something that we'll still—we are watching. And I think the future will give us the best assessment of the question you are asking. It may be too soon to really give you much of a further characterization of that. But remember, this is something that the Government of Iraq elected to do and they passed legislation specifically to help this country move forward and to help deal with the many cases that they have accrued over the last few years. Yes, sir.

REP5: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Question from Al-Hayat Newspaper.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** One second. There it is.

INT: Question from Al-Hayat Newspaper.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** Thank you. Shukran.

REP5: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Yesterday there has been a bombing on Sadr City and there were some clashes also with JAM. Could you also give us some details about the plans of the Multi-National Forces with the confrontation with JAM? And is there a timetable for the confrontation and the clashes with JAM? Thank you.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** Well, first of all, the Government of Iraq is undertaking operations specifically targeting criminal elements and they are not identifying a specific political entity or the associated members of that political group. So the focus here is on criminals who are violating the rule of law and terrorizing the Iraqi people. Our operations in Baghdad are in support of the Baghdad Operations Command and General

About and the same is true for operations in East Baghdad and those in the area of Sadr City and New Baghdad and other districts of Baghdad. One of the areas that we are focused on in particular is reducing the threat of indirect fire that is indiscriminately targeting and killing Iraqi citizens, those who work and live in the seat of Iraqi government inside the International Zone, and those coalition and Iraqi security forces as well. So that is the focus of the operations specifically to reduce the actions of criminal elements and to reduce the capability of those perpetrating the indirect fire attacks. Shukran.

REP5: [Unintelligible.]

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** Mm-hmm.

REP5: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Is there a timetable for the operations? That is before the elections, is there a timetable? Can we say that the operations will be over before the elections in the provinces?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** The operations that are underway are really targeting criminal elements and the degree to which those criminal elements comply with the rule of law and stop the hostilities that have been

undertaken will really inform how long these operations take. And I am not aware of a specific timeline that would drive that. It's really based on improving compliance with the rule of law and reducing the indirect fire threat. Shukran. Yes, sir.

REP6: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: When there was a raid by the Multi-National Forces against the houses of the citizens, the Multi-National Forces confiscate the mobils and the computers from the houses of the citizens. So what is your comment about this? And this is what happened to the correspondent of Radio Sawa a few days ago.

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Well, when coalition or Iraqi security forces have to conduct an operation like that, we have learned from our experience that electronic devices are frequently the source of intelligence and information that can help deter other attacks and help protect the Iraqi people. And so when it is necessary to confiscate those electronic devices, it is only for the purpose of protecting other citizens. And once those have been assessed and determined not to be something that needs to be further retained or held in confiscation, they should be returned to the owner and returned to the household and so forth. But they are—the reason that they are taken is specifically to help protect others from potential attacks.

Shukran. Yes, sir.

REP7: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: I have two questions. The Sadr Trend said that the building of the— there's a building was still occupied by the American forces and some documents had been burned and damaged by the coalition forces. And the second question, do you have any information regarding the cordon operation against the Iranian Embassy that was taken place today?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** To your first question, I'm not familiar with the building that you are referring to, the specifics of such a building. I will tell you that the coalition forces take great care to not expose innocent citizens and adjacent property to damage and we take that responsibility very seriously. And I am not familiar with your specific question about the Iranian Embassy today but will follow up with you and see if there is any specific information we can provide. As for our operations around East Baghdad in the vicinity of Sadr City, those operations again are specifically to deal with the criminal elements that are endangering Iraqi citizens and coalition forces and an effort by the Government of Iraq to enforce the rule of law. And so that's why they are there. I would also point out that they are taking great effort to ensure the freedom of movement for the things that [the]

citizens of Sadr City need whether it be water, fuel, food, medical and health supplies. They are taking every measure to ensure that those can travel into and support the needs of the citizens in Sadr City which is difficult because, as you know, the criminals have subverted those kinds of shipments in the past to bring weapons and other material support in to serve their purposes. So at times there are delays. At times there are difficulties in ensuring that vehicles are properly passed through. But I can tell you from talking to both General Abboud, General Hammond, and General Austin that they are strongly committed to making that happen and making sure the flow of support to the citizens there is sufficient. Shukran. Yes, sir.

REP8:

Ernesto Londoño with The Washington Post. Can you comment on reports that there is a growing number of roadside bombs that you are seeing in Eastern Baghdad? Are you seeing that on the ground and is it hindering your ability to move around and operate?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, we do know that the criminal elements have placed improvised explosive devices in the roads; they have sought to make it difficult for both Iraqi forces and coalition forces to accomplish our mission. And they have also placed those in depth in positions where they are concerned about Iraqi security forces conducting their operations.

REP8: Do you see any change in the MO? Are you seeing different sorts of roadside bombs in that area?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: We continue to see both a mixture of improvised explosive devices that are former artillery shells reconfigured. We also see the presence of explosively-formed penetrators which we know are a hallmark of the Iranian support to the special groups in particular and so we have seen those in significant numbers as well. Jim.

REP2: This may be a subject of a longer conversation, General. But, you know, we also have a—everybody—I think everybody in this room has difficulty when it comes to reporting on the special groups. There was a—and doing it in some accurate way. Because you draw a lot of nuances when you talk about how you are going after these guys. Ambassador Crocker said something like—during the last testimony, something like there was a threat at one point that the special groups were merging with the main Mahdi Army. This was before the Basra operation. He didn't really indicate whether that threat had ended or whether it had happened or it had been headed off or what have you. We have guys on the ground—we had a guy on the ground in Basra. He thought that at certain points he could tell the difference, but it wasn't easy, there was just very subtle

things. Then, again, at other times they sort of would meld together and disappear – the main body of the Mahdi and what you are calling special groups. In Sadr City, you want to secure the launch sites; that's one of your goals you said. You've said repeatedly that those launch sites are really a hallmark of the special groups and that the rockets are coming from Iran. But when you go and look on the ground again, it just sort of looks like a hornets' nest over there. I mean I haven't been over there many times, maybe two or three times myself in the last couple of weeks, but it looks sort of like a hornets' nest being stirred up. Again, pretty hard to tell, you know, who you are fighting. How do you—now you're in an urban environment where you are getting shot at from different buildings; it's a confused fight. You know, the wife of one of our fixers was shot in the back by a stray bullet two nights ago. Don't know who shot it. Don't know where it came from, just from one of the battles. Kind of a, you know, to them it looks like a free-for-all and they just refer to the Mahdi. And at the same time you'll also hear Iraqis talk about special groups; they have a different name for it. Can we appeal for some kind of wisdom on this? I mean it's a pretty nuanced set of distinctions you are asking us to make and I honestly—I've been here five years and I don't understand them. I don't understand the difference; I don't understand how you know the difference. I don't understand how you are shaping the

battlefield so that you are going after what you're calling criminal elements and special groups but you're not targeting this broader swath of the populace that obviously is packed in to this two million person area in Sadr City and elsewhere in Iraq. Can you help us out on that? Maybe a little bit now, maybe a little bit with further thought on this because we are really up against it when we're trying to explain this to ourselves and then to our readers.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Let me start this way if I could and go back to just about a year ago when coalition forces detained Qais[ph] Kas[ph] Ali, his brother Laith[ph], and a Lebanese Hezbollah operative named Ali Musaductu[ph]. In the course of what we learned from those three, in particular from Qais[ph] Kas[ph] Ali who was then the commander of the special groups in Iraq, he is the one who described these as special groups. This was his terminology, it was his characterization. And he characterized them as such because the special groups were the ones that benefited most directly from the funding, the training, the equipping, and the tactical guidance that they received from their Quds Force network sources. And so that's the baseline, if you will, for why do we call them that. What we typically see is you see a level of expertise, you see a level of equipment that is associated with signature weapons that the Quds Force is providing to the special groups through these networks, and

you also see a level of competence associated with that as well which is a result of some of the training that takes place. And so that is what—that's how you draw the distinction: where does the term special groups come from and how are we trying to—why is that term associated with them. The second component of that is well, how are they different? And this is where there is movement among different groups and it is more complex than those distinctions can account for. So there is a complexity there that will sometimes see a special group relying on other individuals who may work with them for a time and then may go work on their own or not be associated with them. The fundamental characterization though of what the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi security forces are engaged in here is dealing with criminals. And those are individuals who are carrying weapons outside the rule of law and they are using those weapons for purposes not authorized and endorsed and supported by the Government of Iraq. And so if you are not carrying a weapon out there, if you're not trying to employ a weapon outside the jurisdiction, if you will, of the security forces then that's a criminal activity.

REP2:

[Asks question off microphone.]

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

That would be any citizen in Iraq would be in that category. So it's,

again, it's not tied to a specific group. Yes, sir.

REP9: Jarrod[?] from AFP. A supplemental question largely to Jim's question. In your experience and assessment of [unintelligible] in the last year, year and a half, after the arrest of Qais[ph] Ali and this whole special group phrase started coming up, do you see that these—who have fund these special groups? Do you see a link directly with the Sadr Movement in that sense? I mean can we—have you interpreted it in a way that these are special groups formed in a way to fight the American presence here? And at the same time, on the political front you have a ceasefire on the umbrella Sadr group so that, you know, the process continues but at the same time you have special groups who keep on fighting American forces out here. I mean how do you link the special groups with the Mahdi Army? Initially you used to call them rogue elements but these days we don't see that happening. But is there a connection still? And...

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** Well...

REP9: ...they could be actually formed with a specific agenda.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** First of all, I'd go back to why would the Iranian Quds Force be equipping, training, funding, and providing tactical direction to

these groups that we all refer to as the special groups? It is to serve their specific interests in Iraq. And those interests include not just attacks against the coalition forces; they include attacks against Iraqi citizens as well. We have seen two governors, we have seen two—one police chief, General Qais, in Babil Province and we have seen another senior police officer in Diwaniyah who was killed along with that governor. All of them were killed as a result of explosively-formed penetrators that were clearly part of the equipping process for the special groups. So this is a problem that isn't just about the coalition forces. This is a problem of Iranian-backed Quds Force support to these special groups that are outside the rule of law. You'll remember that during the period of the last several months, these are people who are outside the ceasefire that Muqtada al-Sadr had declared. And so these are individuals who may have been associated—certainly had an association and affiliation with Jaish al-Mahdi or other elements but have since operated outside the guidance of the Sadr Trend.

REP9: [Unintelligible] sure about that particular fact that they actually operate outside the guidance of Muqtada al-Sadr?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Well, I would go back to the point we talked about with Jim which is this is a complex arrangement. And exactly what each of their

motivations is is not always something we can say with complete applicability. But without question, they have operated outside that guidance that we saw for quite some time. Yes, sir.

REP10: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: A few weeks ago the Green Zone was targeted heavily with mortars and rockets. Do you blame the Iraqi forces? And what this has to do with the raid against the assistant or the advisor of the prime minister? And does this have to do with the mortar attacks against the International Zone?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: I'm not sure your—could you just—or just tell me one more time. Walk me through his question.

INT: Sir, he's asking about the recent attacks targeting the Green Zone. A few weeks ago—he's asking a few weeks ago we have witnessed a severe and heavy attack of mortars against the International Zone.

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Right.

INT: At the same time, there was a raid conducted against one of the advisors of Prime Minister Maliki against her house, I guess, which is inside the Green Zone. So is all this connected in a way?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

The violence that has increased in the last several weeks has manifested itself in a number of ways and you mentioned indirect fire, you mentioned the kidnappings of government officials. Are all those related? We're still learning more about the specifics of Dr. Sheikhly, Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly's kidnapping and exactly who was involved to exploit that. We do know that the indirect fire attacks are largely a result of special groups and the Iranian-backed weapons systems that they are employing, 107millimeter rockets in particular. So exactly what the relationship is from the kidnapping to the indirect fire attacks is something we'll know more about as we exploit the intelligence from that. Yes, sir.

REP11:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

Yesterday several troops of the Peshmerga were sent to Baghdad. Why has that happened? Is that to support the Iraqi troops?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

I'll have to check on the specific movement that you are talking about in terms of forces deploying to Baghdad. So I'll follow up with you on exactly what unit you are talking about. But there have been a number of deployments to support operations in Basra. There have been troop movements to further support operations in Mosul. So there are a number of Iraqi Army deployments that are

underway specifically to put the Iraqi security forces, in this case, the Iraqi Army, in places where they need to be to best accomplish the missions that they've been given. But I'll follow up with you on specifics of the movement you might be referring to. Shukran. Yes, ma'am.

REP12: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: A few days ago two have been captured; one of them is an emir in al-Qaeda and another one was his assistant in Basra. And we know that Basra and operations there targeted the extremists and the Shi'ite extremists. So what do you think about the presence of al-Qaeda in Basra? And second, what is your evaluation of the security situation regarding or considering that it has been improved by 70%? So what is your assessment of the security situation and its development in Iraq and in Baghdad in general? And President Bush said a few days ago that the presence in Iraq of the American troops was or is to defend certain aims that was set in Iraq or goals. What are those aims?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: First to Basra, the vast majority of the security challenge there facing the Iraqi security forces is not associated with al-Qaeda. In fact, my understanding is the successful operations recently conducted were against leaders of special groups, rogue militia

units there. And I'll follow up with you on whether or not there are al-Qaeda elements actually involved in that as well. But the majority of the problems facing the citizens of Basra are the criminal groups that are the reason that Prime Minister Maliki deployed forces there and undertook these operations. And the second part of your question was about the overall security situation?

REP12: [Responds off microphone.]

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** Yeah. Even as difficult as the last few weeks have been and, in particular, yesterday was in terms of the loss of life, the overall trend in security is much better than it was a year ago. And we have said all along that there will be periods in which we will see al-Qaeda and other extremist groups seek to reassert themselves. And the real issue here is the Government of Iraq's increasing capability to take on those threats and deal with those. And that's what we do see as a significant difference as well from this time a year ago. There is a greater willingness on the part of the Government of Iraq. There is a greater capability on the part of their security forces, albeit one that's uneven, one that still has significant challenges, but one that is in a better place today than it was a year ago. So while we continue to have very tough days as we did yesterday and very

tough weeks as we have for the last three weeks or so, we continue to see improving capability and improving commitment. And that's encouraging. Most encouraging though is the commitment and the courage of the Iraqi people to reject the violence in their communities and work more closely with their security forces and the coalition. And that's one of the features that I see in the reporting in Basra today. In Basra the Iraqi Army forces, in particular, are finding improved support from the local citizens in terms of tips, in terms of their cooperation and working more closely with them. Shukran.

REP12: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: A recent statement made by President Bush said that we have goals in Iraq and we need to defend them. So what are those goals?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Well, the main goal is to help the Government of Iraq establish the capabilities to sustain itself, to govern itself, and to defend itself. And we're working on all of those fronts with the Government of Iraq, the Iraqi security forces, and the citizens of Iraq. And I would go back to the statement I just made which is—and we see significant progress, really in all three of those. If you just look at the amount of legislative activity that the Government of Iraq has undertaken and completed in the last three months, it is quite

significant especially compared to a year ago. And the same applies to their economy. The economy of Iraq is in a much better place. Inflation is much more manageable. The Iraqi dinar is relatively strong. And they are working on a budget that has a significant capability to address the needs of the citizens of Iraq this year. And then if I went to the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi police, I would point to the capability to deploy some 6,600 members of the security forces to Basra and undertake operations there with—under the leadership of the Government of Iraq. So there are significant improvements being made in all of those areas. Albeit a tough fight still to go, tough days as we've talked about, and an uneven capability still in the Iraqi security forces, uneven capability to sustain their operations. They still struggle with things like soldiers fulfilling their mission and staying on the task that they are given. So those are things that the Iraqi leaders take very seriously – I know from having spoken to them – and will take the necessary remedial steps. But still a better place than a year ago. Shukran. Yes, ma'am. Right behind Ned.

REP13: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Question from al-Huriya TV. How would you evaluate the Iraqi Army? Could you evaluate the Iraqi Army as it is or it could handle the political and the military aspects in Iraq? And what is your

opinion regarding some of those troops that or soldiers that handed over their weapons to JAM, especially after Muqtada al-Sadr asked to forgive them and give them another chance to go back to the or serve the Iraqi security forces.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Yeah. Let me give you a little bit of a personal answer to your question. I served in Mosul in 2005 as the deputy commander of our forces there. And I worked with a police chief whose name was General Ahmed[ph] and the 2nd Iraqi Army Division and the 3rd Iraqi Army Division commanders, General Korsheed and back then it was General Khalid who commanded the 2nd Division. And the 2nd and the 3rd division were just getting started. They did not have the capability, literally, to get themselves into Tal Afar at that point in time. Later they did. They didn't have the capability to move and support their forces in downtown Mosul. Eventually they would develop that capability. But I look at where those units were and I look at where the Iraqi Army is today and you can't help but see a significant improvement in their ability and the level of professionalism. The other thing that I look at is I look at the leaders that I have personally come to know. General Abdul Amir[ph], who commands the 6th Iraqi Army Division here in Baghdad, was a brigade commander in Mosul during the time that I served there. And I remember thinking this is a guy who is a

tremendous soldier; a very effective leader. And to see that he has gone from being a brigade commander to now a division commander in one of the toughest fights that the Iraqi people are facing, here in Baghdad, gives me encouragement as a soldier because I see that there are people out there who are being promoted and selected and assigned based on merit. I say the same thing about General Othman. He was a part of the joint headquarters when I was here last time. Now he commands the 8th Iraqi Army Division and, by all accounts, is doing a very good job in dealing with the challenges in Southeastern Iraq. And I would say the same thing about General Korsheed who commands the 3rd Iraqi Army Division and I served with up there. So if I just use my own personal experience in terms of the leaders and their matriculation and what they are doing today, there is a good basis of encouragement. Now having said that, all of us as soldiers are disappointed when we see fellow soldiers that can't perform their mission and can't stand up to the challenge that they are given. But we also look at what is the chain of command then doing about it and is the Government of Iraq taking that seriously or are the ministries taking those problems seriously? And our sense is they do. There's still much more work to do in those cases, but yes, they're taking those issues very seriously. Shukran. Yes, sir.

REP14: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Regarding the militias, political sides – Iraqi and other ones – describe the Peshmerga as militia and they accuse them of conducting violence against the Turkmen in Urp[ph] and Mosul. What is the stance of the Multi-National Forces from this? And is there a presence of the Peshmerga troops in Kirkuk and Mosul now?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Well, I guess what I would point out to you is that the Iraqi Army forces in the places you described have a mixture of diversity in their formations. They do have a significant number of Kurdish forces in those units and it reflects the proximity of those units to Kurdistan. It also reflects the fact that some of those units came out of former Peshmerga units and now are part of the Iraqi Army. And so there is a transition that's still underway to integrate and to fully assimilate all of those forces into the Iraqi Army. I think that's where your question was headed. Shukran. Ned.

REP4: Just a quick one. I'm just curious. We've heard widely varying numbers in terms of impacts of rockets and mortars in the IZ over the last three weeks since the start of the Basra operation. Do you have—can you quantify that for us? Do you have a total number approximately that have come in since the start of the operation?

And then can you tell us why – and this is all anecdotal on my part – but why there has been a diminishment in that number over the last week or so?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Yeah. I'll get you a detailed accounting as good as we can on the numbers. I don't have one here at my fingertips. But I will tell you that the reason that the—the significant part of the reason that the attacks have declined is because of the actions taken by Multi-National Division – Baghdad and the Iraqi security forces. They have taken the necessary steps to interdict. They have taken the necessary steps to interdict not only the indirect fire teams before they can launch attacks, but they have also been successful in finding a large number of weapons caches and finding both rocket rails [and] the rockets themselves before they could be moved to the point of a firing point and be employed. So the troopers of Multi-National Division – Baghdad and the Iraqi security forces under General Abud are working that very, very hard. And that's largely why the indirect fire has been reduced. Yes, sir.

REP4:

General, just a question on Bilal Hussein, the AP photographer who...

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Mm-hmm.

REP4:

I understand he's going to be released today. A statement from Major General Stone on Monday made pretty clear that he wasn't being exonerated of any wrongdoing. Given that, I'm just wondering is there any chance he might be rearrested? I mean can he go about his—if he decides to do so, can he just take up his work as a photographer again? I was just wondering what your comment is?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, you know, he had been referred to the Iraqi criminal courts on charges of terrorism and kidnapping. And in March, an Iraqi investigative judge had referred that case to trial. In April, when separate Iraqi judicial committees reviewed those cases along with, as you have already mentioned, thousands of other Iraqis that fell under the provisions of Iraq's new amnesty law, these amnesty committees do not judge the merits of the case nor the guilt or innocence of the individual but they look exclusively at the categorization of the charges relative to the provisions of the amnesty law. As a result of those rulings, the Iraqi courts no longer had a basis to try the charges against Bilal Hussein because of the amnesty law's application. So our understanding is he is absolved, he has received amnesty relative to those charges that had existed. And so there is no intent that I'm aware of to further pursue those

nor is there a legal basis to do so that we're aware of. Last question.
Yes, sir.

REP15: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: General, you have said that you have found documents and someone called Abu Safyan and that he is connected to Abu Ayyub al-Masri but you haven't revealed or said that have you detained this person or he was killed or was he killed?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** Yeah.

REP18: [Continues speaking in Arabic.]

INT: And you haven't specified the location, the exact location where this happened.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** Yeah. The location was northwest of Baghdad is where he was—is where this letter was actually found and we are still developing basic knowledge about Abu Safyan and his actual status because he was, as I mentioned, he was not part of those who we either killed or captured during the operation in early March. So we are still developing our understanding of exactly what role he plays other than we know he was part of al-Qaeda in Iraq's operations in Diyala. Shukran. Shukran jaziilan everyone. Thank you for your

time this afternoon and ma'salama.